

The Bonnie Situation¹

Bonnie Evelyn Armes was the youngest child of Donald and Marcella “Sally” Armes. She was born in August 1944 in San Pedro, CA while her father was working in a war time job in the Navy shipyard.² Her birth was announced by Don as “another damn girl!” Thus she joined her big sisters Mollie and Ruthie, and her brother Tommy; the latter as the only boy may well have been the family’s most beloved sibling.³

You can’t go home again: When Bonnie was about three years old, Sally and Don grew homesick for their old life in Nebraska, where they were both born and raised, and where they met and married. Don’s uncle provided a dairy farm that they could lease in St Edward and the couple loaded up the family and took off. I once asked Sally how long it took to realize that you can’t go home again. “About two weeks,” she replied. The family stayed two years, despite finding that life had changed, cliques had replaced close relationships, and farm life in Nebraska was damn hard. Each Sunday evening Don wrote a weekly letter back to his parents in California, and in 2002, Mollie and Ruthie compiled and published a subset of this collection. These humorous anecdotes of life on the dairy farm with ‘the kids’ (Tommy and Bonnie) and ‘the girls’ (Mollie and Ruthie) make for most entertaining reading. In 1948, the family moved back to Lomita, CA, never to move again. Bonnie says that when you read those letters, you will understand why.

Shmoos: Years later, when Bonnie was about 15 or 16, she was reminiscing with her mother about those Nebraska days, and mentioned the herd of shmoos they raised on the farm. Sally looked at her with more than a bit of disbelief. “Bonnie, you do know that shmoos are not real ... don’t you?” “What? No, I



¹ Title card from Pulp Fiction (1994), Bonnie’s least favorite modern movie.

² On 8 December 1943, the US Navy had seized control of Los Angeles SB&DDC (Los Angeles Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, founded in April 1917 for WW I work) under an executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

³ Donald Eugene “Don” Armes: FGM #71282252; Marcella Marie “Sally” Hirsch Armes: #71282253; Tommy: #295905

can picture we had that long road going to the dairy barn – and there were cows out in the field on the left – and the shmoos were in the field on the right.” “Bonnie, honey that was a corn field!” For entertainment, Don had formed and painted plaster of Paris molds of various animals – and shmoos, the cute little creatures introduced on 31 Aug 1948 by Al Capp in his *L’il Abner* strip which were so accommodating as a food source. Apparently they made an impression on Bonnie.

Sibling squabbles: The “little kids”, Tommy and Bonnie, were always squabbling, and since Tommy was the older one, he was smart enough to strike first and then yell when Bonnie retaliated. Sally had the theory that most kids misbehavior must be attributed to constipation; thus the standard treatment for fighting and carrying on was either Castor Oil or Milk of Magnesia. Once after an alternation, Sally was out of ‘the cure’ and sent Tommy to St Edward to buy some Milk of Magnesia. Tommy apparently had a pang of conscience, because upon his return, he sidled up to Bonnie and whispered, “I got you the mint flavor!”

The kids always traveled in the back seat of the car with the expected interactions. They were told to stay on their own side of the seat, but Tommy figured out how to overcome the invisible barrier. Bonnie complained at once: “Mom! Tommy’s breathing on me!” Without missing a beat, Sally intoned, “Tommy! Stop breathing!”

Drive-in: The popularity of the drive-in movie spiked after World War II and reached its heyday in the late 1950s. When Bonnie was about 10 years old, and Don was off at a Boy Scout weekend with Tommy, Sally and Bonnie decided to try out one of these new outdoor theatres. Sally fried up some chicken and made some mashed potatoes and baked a chocolate cake. They filled up a big picnic basket and left early in order to get a good spot. Once parked, Bonnie headed down to the playground, had a great time and then headed back to the car where she and her Mom dove into the great dinner. After that, they got tired and fell asleep. They awoke to horns honking as it was dark and people were leaving the drive-in; they had slept through the entire feature and all the coming attractions! They never did see the movie.

Sassy: When Bonnie was about 16, Sally underwent some dental surgery and was laid up for awhile. Bonnie was visiting with her, and made the mistake of ‘sassing her mother.’ Sally said, “Bend over so I can slap your face.” Bonnie dutifully leaned over the bed, and Sally weakly reached up and barely touched her cheek. They both burst out laughing.



The Denial: Bonnie attended Bishop Montgomery High School in Torrance, CA. The school had no cafeteria, so the students would bring their own lunch and often

Bonnie would sit out in the grass with her friends under a tree. One day, a truck pulled up, a sight to behold. One of the girls said, "Bonnie, isn't that your father?" "Ah ... no, I don't think so," stammered an embarrassed Bonnie. At the time, Don Armes was the manager of Lomita Lath & Plaster, and had indeed come bouncing across the school terrain, sporting bright red suspenders, a denim shirt with macramé birds emblazoned on the collar, in his brightly painted yellow and red company truck with a load of gerbils in the back and a dog hanging out the window. About that time he spots the girls, and turns with a big wave: "HI, BONNIE!"

9/11: If you survived Y2K, you have a story of where you were on 9/11: that September morn in 2001 when the news came across the air waves that "A plane has hit one of the Twin Towers in Manhattan." Bonnie's story is a bit more immediate: she, her daughters Beth and Marcey and granddaughters Mollie and Maggie were all in Boston, Mass - the city from which two of the four aircraft used as weapons of mass destruction were hijacked that Tuesday in 2001.

The three generations of Armes girls were there for a special eye operation for 4-year old Mollie Baland, who was born with *aniridia*, a condition in which the iris of the eye is non-existent. With this condition, a patient is more likely to get macular degeneration and cataracts, and this operation was to improve her vision, as the condition cannot be completely resolved, even with an eye transplant. When they got in the cab, Marcey and her 13-month old daughter Maggie joined them, having driven out from Lewisburg, PA - or from Princeton? Beth and Mollie and Marcey rode in the back of the cab, and Bonnie rode up front in the passenger seat - and then the word came across the radio that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center. They assumed it was a small plane, and the taxi ride continued to MassGeneral (University of Massachusetts General Hospital). Upon arrival, young Mollie was checked in and prepped for the surgery. Then the word came through about the attack. Immediately, the Hospital went on full emergency alert, canceling all operations and preparing for what they thought would be a massive influx of emergency patients. The nurse came in and said all surgeries were cancelled; a bit later she came back and informed the group that the doctor said, "Well, this little girl is prepped, ready to go, this is a 45 minute operation and I'm going to go ahead with it." - which he did. Of course, due to the brutal method of attack, there were no 'injured' patients to be medevaced from New York, or the Pentagon, or Pennsylvania, to Boston.

Following the operation, while Mollie was recovering in her room, the little family group watched the continuous television news coverage of the horrific and courageous events of the day. When released later that day, they put Mollie in her stroller and walked back to their hotel where they had to prove they were registered guests, and again were required to show ID to get on the elevator. Little Mollie, with her one eye bandaged, only wanted some ice cream. There was a Ben & Jerry's on the ground floor, but all the stores, all the restaurants were closed down. Finally, Bonnie went to the hotel restaurant, and found the maître d' up front. "My

granddaughter has just undergone an eye operation, and all she wants is some vanilla ice cream. Can you help us?" The maître d' disappeared into the kitchen, returned with a big bowl of vanilla ice cream – and would not accept any money for it.

They had to stay another day. The planes hit on Tuesday, and they had to go back (on Wednesday or Thursday) for a follow-up look by the surgeon. The next morning, the trio were ready to head home to Albuquerque – but how? Logan Airport was closed in Boston, as were most of the airports on the East Coast. All rental agencies were emptied of vehicles. Bonnie phoned back to daughter Katy in Albuquerque, and Katy's husband Tony was able to use some of his American Express travel connections to locate a rental agency in nearby Cambridge, Mass that may have a vehicle available.

Marcey drove the three to Cambridge. As they pulled into the rental agency, a couple was just bringing a car in for return. Without a pause, the couple got out, and the three new renters jumped in, and away they went. Marcey waved a quick good-bye and returned with little Maggie to Lewisburg.

Driving to Albuquerque was an almost continuous operation: Beth would drive for awhile, then Bonnie. They would stop for gasoline, and to grab some food. They went into a K-Mart and got Mollie (some crayons? Something to play with during the trip, and the two adults drove on. When they went through St. Louis, they saw the arch, and kept driving. It took them 2 ½ days to return to Albuquerque.